

A delegation of ESSAA representatives met with Commissioner Elia and Deputy Commissioner, Chuck Szuberla on October 13th. The ESSAA representatives were Carol Conklin-Spillane, RASA Vice President; Matt Kravatz, ESSAA Member; Michael McDermott, RASA President; Ryan Schoenfeld, WNYAA President; Michael A. Starvaggi, ESSAA Executive Director and Skip Voorneveld, CAS President.

The tone of the meeting was cordial and cooperative and our delegation was very encouraged at the receptiveness to our input shown by the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. We are optimistic that we can forge a meaningful relationship with SED where our input will have a real impact in shaping policy. This does not, of course, mean that there won't be obstacles. There will be many. But the general sense we received is that we have an opportunity to have our message heard and considered by the Department and conveyed to the Board of Regents. This is a very positive step in our opinion.

The topics discussed at the meeting were as follows.

Computer-Based Testing:

The Commissioner stated that QUESTAR is rolling-out a computer-based assessment program and that, by 2020, it will be fully implemented. It will allow quick feedback to teachers on their students' strengths and weaknesses. Currently it is being used on an opt-in basis for field test questions only. There has been a great deal of interest, with over 70 schools applying for the pilot program.

The Commissioner said that a \$2Billion bond had been passed for the purpose of ensuring that all districts will have the resources needed to successfully implement the program. She also said that the program includes training students in computerized test-taking skills.

We asked what the impact will be on PARCC assessments and the Commissioner said that Questar will be handling assessments for the next three years but PARCC may be doing other diagnostic testing.

Learning Standards:

The Commissioner said that there will be an on-line opportunity for educators and parents to give feedback on what needs to be changed in common core state standards.

This discussion noted that, if standards are to be validly critiqued, there needs to be specification of where the problems lay and what can be done to fix them. A general dissatisfaction with the standards is not sufficient. The on-line forum will serve this purpose.

The Commissioner is asking district superintendents to hold meetings to announce this opportunity. All educators are encouraged to use this opportunity to comment on the standards.

APPR:

To date there have been about 116 waiver requests and about 12 plans submitted for approval.

The Commissioner said that some supplemental assessments have been approved but more need to be reviewed.

The Commissioner also said that waivers will be harder to obtain in March.

We asked that SED make arrangement to share model plans as they are approved.

We also discussed how to plan for implementing Section 3012-d during the 2015-16 school year. Specifically, we asked, how districts are supposed to satisfy the requirements of the new plan if it is not approved until mid-year. The Commissioner seemed to state that preparations should be made for implementing the new plans in 2016-17, but said that the issue would be further clarified as the year goes on.

The group talked about de-emphasizing testing as a means of evaluating principals. While the Commissioner did not disagree, she also clearly stated that the law will probably not change and that we needed to explore ways to achieve a balance within the existing statutory/regulatory framework.

Although she did not seem optimistic about actually changing the law, she said that she could be a “voice” for principals as to best practices as to appropriate evaluation criteria. The Commissioner agreed with us that “a school cannot make it if it doesn’t have a good leader” which we take as a signal of support for building leaders.

The Commissioner cautioned that principals should not automatically give high ratings on the observation portion of teachers’ APPR just because they believe that the testing portion is not fairly calculated. She considers this to be in opposition to the principal’s duty.

The Commissioner also discussed an allocation request for funding to support teacher and principal development. She asked for our input on a plan to support teachers and principals in the transition to the new standards.

Governor’s Task Force:

First meeting is coming up. This is the Governor’s commission and the utilization of the information is not clear yet.

Carol Conklin-Spillane has been named to the Task Force and will be working alongside the Commissioner to make recommendations about Common Core.

Practical Issues:

Our delegation mentioned the fact that SED has not determined the Algebra II/Trig Regents that will be offered this year and that this makes it very difficult for teachers to develop an appropriate lesson approach. The Commissioner stated that SED is alert to the issue and said she does not intend to punish kids for decisions made by adults. No other details were provided and we will follow-up on this issue.

Learning Summit Recommendations:

The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner both agreed that the current growth score model is under scrutiny. Commissioner Elia said she is reviewing the model and that there “may be some shift” in the model as a result.

Deputy Commissioner, Chuck Szuberla said the Board of Regents is taking a much closer look at VAM and that he understands that the growth score needs to be revised to make it function more fairly.

He also stated that he wants a system where there is no built-in limit to what percentage of teachers or principals can be Highly Effective, since he sees that as creating an artificial cap on effectiveness.

Value Added Model and Growth Model is being looked at. There are things that we can do better. High performing schools - there are shifts where the performance doesn't match degradation.

The "compression" causes problems. That's good news.

CC suggested that there could be a choice as to which model would be used instead of a "one size fits all" approach. Chuck did not disagree but reminded us that this is something that would need legislative action.

PD:

**SV brought up the possibility of ESSAA becoming certified to offer PD. Chuck said that he would send us a model for the standards developed for the Business Official title and would welcome our thoughts on similar standards for other administrative titles.

What Can We Do?:

Need a united front with which to approach the legislature. If ESSAA, SED and the Board of Regents are disjointed, the legislature will assume that we have no consensus and will attempt to solve the problem for us. So we need specific suggestions.

Also, he asked for some examples of the positive elements of APPR and how it has worked to make principals or teachers better.

Need for an alliance between us, SED and the Board of Regents – whereby we give input to Commissioner who advocates to the Board of Regents who then take appropriate steps to respond to legislative initiatives and mandates like they did with the SPGS appeal, waiver for rural districts as to independent evaluators and non-

disclosure of ratings. SV thanked the Commissioner for intervening on these items and the Commissioner was very appreciative of the recognitions